

Wednesday, December 24, 2003

Dr. Riggs followed his three C's for health department success

A patient man. A respectful man. A consensus builder.

Those phrases describe Wendell Riggs, M.D., health officer for the [Tippecanoe County Health Department](#) for the last 18 years.

"Dr. Riggs has been an outstanding health officer for the people of Tippecanoe County," said State Health Commissioner Greg Wilson, M.D. "We wish him well in his retirement. He has also served as a role model for me and many pediatricians. He has exemplified how physicians can serve their patients both on an individual basis and also by strengthening the public health system."

Dr. Riggs, who counts as one of his many achievements the merging of Tippecanoe County, West Lafayette, and Lafayette health departments, is retiring at the end of January 2004.

The three health departments merged in 1994 and became the Tippecanoe County Health Department. The merge eliminated duplication of programs and made for a more efficient and manageable system, Dr. Riggs said.

"You can't have public health programs in three cities doing the same things," he said.

In accomplishing the merger, Dr. Riggs followed his own "three C's" of leadership, which has served him well as he has advocated for new public health programs in the county.

The three C's?

- ★ Collaboration
- ★ Community benefit
- ★ Consensus

"I went to the county government administration and told them, 'This is good for the community.' I worked with our state representatives – we had collaboration. We got everyone to the table – we had consensus," Dr. Riggs said.

Ronald Cripe, administrator of the Tippecanoe County Health Department, agreed that Dr. Riggs uses the three C's.



Still frame from video by Wade Kiffmeyer

William Riggs, M.D. looks eye to eye at a young patient.

"He has a collaborative way. He understands everybody's positions," Cripe said. "He'll be missed. You don't replace a legacy."

Cripe said that the merging of the three health departments was one of Dr. Riggs' greatest accomplishments.

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Weights and Measures: Making sure you get what you pay for



Photo by Daniel Axler
Larry Stump checks out the scale to make sure it is accurate.

When you go to the grocery store and buy a pound of hamburger, you can feel confident that you'll be charged only for the pound – not a pound and an ounce and not for the weight of the package – thanks to the [Division of Weights and Measures](#) at the State Department of Health.

The Division of Weights and Measures checks retail scales – not only to make sure they're accurate, but also to make sure that the businesses have set their scales for tare. Tare is the weight of a container or wrapper deducted from gross weight to get net weight, explains Larry Stump,

the division's director.

The first step in checking for tare is to weigh the packaging. Weights and Measures inspectors take state scales to the stores to do this, Stump says.

They go to places like grocery stores or delicatessens and weigh the Styrofoam containers and the plastic wrapping and then make sure the stores' scales have been calibrated to subtract the weight of the package (the tare) with just the touch of the tare button.

"You might not think those containers weigh much, but it could be .04 pound and that could add up to an extra 50 cents for the steaks you're buying for the weekend," Stump says.

Inspectors do tare inspections twice a year and test scales for accuracy at least once a year at each commercial business.

"If the scale is off, then the tare could be off," he says. "Sometimes we find that the retailer is losing money because their scale is off."

According to the division's annual report,

from June 2002 to June 2003, 18,432 retail food store scales were inspected, and 535,476 packages checked. Inspectors found 486,055 weighed correctly; 49,421 (9 percent) were rejected.

Weights and Measures has scales that can weigh anything from something as light as a strand of hair to something that weighs up to 2½ tons, Stump says.

Indiana counties with populations of more than 30,000 are required to have a local Weights and Measures inspector, either full time or part time. There are 59 county and city jurisdictions and 82 local inspectors, Stump says. There are seven state inspectors. In addition to conducting routine inspection and testing of commercial weighing and measuring devices, inspectors investigate consumer complaints.

"Just about everything is measured," Stump says. "We want to make sure that the consumer is protected. The amount of retail trade going across scales is phenomenal."

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Dr. Riggs: Respectful advocacy paid dividends

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"We had very fractured services with three different health departments. Now we're consistent in the delivery of our services. Dr. Riggs's leadership drove the merger," he said.

Program funding for the Tippecanoe County Health Department comes through the county commissioners and county council, which means Dr. Riggs spends a lot of time advocating before the two boards and using his three C's.

His persistence and respectful advocacy have paid dividends. When he came on board as health officer, the Tippecanoe County Health Department had only a part-time nurse. Dr. Riggs wanted – and got – a full-time nurse. The Health Department now has 18 employees.

Dr. Riggs got the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program started in Tippecanoe County and has seen it outgrow its original location and move to a location across the street from St. Elizabeth Hospital. WIC serves more than 3,500 clients and "is booming," Dr. Riggs said.

One of his proudest accomplishments is the founding of the Tippecanoe Community

Health Clinic, which opened in 1988 as part of the health department. It is now a separate non-profit entity that receives money from the Indiana State Department of Health, the United Way, federal grants, and other funding sources.

The Community Health Clinic started out in a 600-square-foot apartment for obstetrics and pediatrics, and now is a 19,000 square-foot clinic serving more than 7,000 patients. The clinic provides primary health care for low-income children and adults on Medicaid or without health insurance.

"As a pediatrician, I saw the need for a health clinic because there were so many people coming to the hospital without prenatal care. I knew in my heart that there were a lot of kids who didn't have health care. If we had a health clinic, we could save babies. We have saved infants' lives. The Community Health Clinic is making a change in people's lives every day," Dr. Riggs said.

In noting the huge role Tippecanoe county government plays in the health department, Dr. Riggs said, "If they (county government) aren't supporting what you're doing, you won't be successful."

He said, "I'm very respectful of people in office. I don't have adversarial relationships. I'm very positive."

Patience plays a part, too.

"You're going to lose a lot of fights. You may have to bring something to the table a couple of times before it's accepted," he said.

Dr. Riggs lists as some of his accomplishments:

- ♦ Tuberculosis Program (patients with positive skin tests are followed in four clinics)
- ♦ Immunization Program (96 percent of children have all required immunizations)
- ♦ Food Service (established the regulation of food service inspection and training)
- ♦ West Nile Virus Program (last year more than 5,000 mosquitoes were sent to the State Department of Health for identification).

Dr. Riggs may be retiring as health officer, but he'll still be around as a volunteer, he said. He'll continue working with children through the Community Health Clinic, and he'll also volunteer at the Tuberculosis Program.

"It's been fun for me, not work," he said of his tenure. "It's been an absolutely wonderful experience."

Weights and Measures: From coffee scales to fish scales

(continued from page 1)

The National Weights and Measures Division, a program of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), estimates that sales of products or services impacted by weights and measures laws in the U.S. is more than \$4.5 trillion a year. This is more than half of the \$8.51 trillion U.S. Gross Domestic Product (1998 figures).

Stump says the list of places with scales is almost endless. Starbucks sells coffee by the pound; candy stores sell bulk candy, and so do convenience stores; the postal service weighs packages; farmers' markets weigh produce; pharmacies weigh medicine by the gram; grain elevators weigh grain; and State Police port of entry inspection sites weigh trucks. All have scales. All are checked by Weights and Measures inspectors.

But there is more to Weights and Measures than scales for weighing.

School lunch milk is measured to make sure a half pint container contains eight fluid ounces and not a half ounce less.

There are taxi cab meters to inspect. Yardsticks and fabric meters at fabric stores come under the scrutiny of Weights and Measures. So do coin-operated laundries and car wash timing devices.

"We'll go into a Laundromat and tell the owner, 'We need some quarters.' Then we sit there and time the dryer with a stop watch to

make sure you're going to get the number of minutes you paid for," Stump says.

Weights and Measures inspects the 100-foot tape measures the State Police use to measure semi-trucks to make sure they're not too wide, too long, or too tall.

Stump says there are 1,800 truck scales in Indiana, including those at grain elevators and truck stops. Any business that loads semi-trucks, such as Red Gold Tomato canneries, Federal Express, or United Parcel Service, will have scales that need to be inspected.

"From the steel mills in Lake County to the coal mines in southern Indiana, Weights and Measures inspectors are making sure that the truck scales are accurate," Stump says.

Weights and Measures also helps with drug enforcement by certifying the accuracy of measuring instruments used to measure the distance from a school or church where a suspected drug dealer has been arrested. Certification of accuracy of the measuring instrument is needed in court, Stump says. Indiana code specifies stricter penalties for selling drugs within 1,000 feet of a school, park, or church.

Weights and Measures also has a Motor Fuels Division, which checks the accuracy of the octane levels in motor fuels and also inspects gasoline pumps for accuracy of the device used to measure the number of gallons pumped.

Stump says there are 3,250 gasoline sta-

tions in Indiana, and all are inspected each year. Last year, state and local inspectors checked 74,451 fuel pumps at gasoline stations, truck stops, marinas, and airports.

Weights and Measures has even weighed the catch of the day, Stump says. A while back, a fisherman caught a really big carp. In order to have the fish proclaimed the state record carp, it had to be weighed on certified scales.

"We told them to bring it on to the lab. It took two guys to unload the fish," Stump said. "The previous record was 39 pounds. This carp weighed in at 65 pounds, a new state record."



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Hoosiers Helping Hoosiers



Photos by Daniel Axler

St. Thomas Aquinas Food Pantry volunteers Fred and Doris Chandler begin to unpack the donations from Indiana State Department of Health employees.



BCCP staff wrap presents for their "adopted family." From left are: Cathey Carter, Janice Addington, Nicole Boone-Poole, Tanya Parrish, Micah Tragesser, Kennetha Tooley, and Carol Case. Not pictured: Kathy Morgan, Shannon Hamm, and Irma Tragesser.

In the spirit of "Hoosiers Helping Hoosiers," the State Department of Health, as an agency and as individuals, has responded to the call from First Lady Maggie Kernan to donate items and volunteer services to Hoosiers in need.

The agency-wide "Hoosiers Helping Hoosiers" campaign to collect non-perishable food and other household items netted 265 food items. These items were delivered to the St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church Food Pantry on Kenwood. The St. Thomas Aquinas food pantry provides emergency food assistance for area residents in need.

Marc LoCascio, ITS, spearheaded the two-week campaign and delivered the donated items to the food pantry. Collection boxes were placed at the State Department of Health building, Weights and Measures, and the Labs.

Other charitable activities around the State Department of Health include:

☺ The Breast and Cervical Cancer Program (BCCP) staff adopted a family from the

Servant's Heart organization and purchased items to give them. Tanya Parrish, BCCP coordinator for the project, said the family – a single mom, a 5-year-old girl, and a 2-year-old girl – will receive two outfits each, socks, underwear, mittens, hats, coloring books, crayons, and puzzles. The two girls will also receive their "wish list" items – a Barbie and some Barbie clothes for the five-year-old and a baby doll with bottles for the two-year-old. Mom will receive a fleece blanket, lotion, bath products, dish towels, and other items.

☺ Mark Mallatt, D.D.S., director of Oral Health, volunteered his dental services at two December events for the homeless. On December 9, Dr. Mallatt provided oral health screenings at the downtown Indianapolis Salvation Army center as part of a health fair sponsored by Gennesaret Free Clinic and the Marion County Health Department. Dr. Mallatt said he saw about 40 homeless during the day. On December 19, he did about 30 oral health screenings at the Disabled Ameri-

can Veterans-Veterans Administration Homeless "Stand Down" at the Tyndall Armory on Pennsylvania Street. This event, also organized by the Gennesaret Free Clinic, provided food, services, and health care to homeless and working poor veterans. Dr. Mallatt took a variety of supplies as well as portable lights and chairs to the clinics.

☺ The Office of Minority Health is collecting "gently used blankets" as part of the "In the Spirit of Giving" campaign, according to the project's coordinator, Tasha Smith-Bonds, Office of Minority Health. Blankets are being collected now until January 16 and will be taken to Holy Family Shelter and Wheeler Mission in Indianapolis. ISDH staff may drop off blankets at the collection box on the first floor of the ISDH near the Federal Express box. This is the third year for the blanket campaign, which is a project of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Indiana Holiday Commission and the Indiana Civil Rights Commission.

WIC receives donation for folic acid kits



Photo by Daniel Axler

The Indiana Chapter of the March of Dimes has donated \$1,000 to the [Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\)](#). The money will be used to purchase 59 folic acid information kits for WIC offices across the state.

Folic acid, which when taken before and very early in pregnancy, helps prevent birth defects of the brain and spinal cord, according to the March of Dimes. WIC is participating in a state-wide folic acid awareness campaign. The kits contain posters, handout materials, promotion ideas, pamphlets, and information about other programs for folic acid awareness. The information in the kits will be used to educate women before and after they get pregnant about folic acid.

In the photo at left are Sharron Farrell, R.D., WIC Nutrition Consultant and Breastfeeding Coordinator; Ernie Yeager, program services coordinator, Indiana Chapter of the March of Dimes; and Wendy Gettlefinger, J.D., ISDH assistant commissioner for Community and Family Health Services.

Year-end Bash



Two Santas, Katheryn Brigham, Office of Legislative Affairs, and Marc LoCascio, ITS, enjoy the Year-End Bash.



ISDH staff gather 'round the food table.

The annual Year-End Bash at the State Department of Health brought out the Holiday Spirit and plenty of good food. The festivities were planned by the Employee Incentive Committee and organized by Marc LoCascio, ITS.



ISDH carolers add a touch of music to the Year-End Bash festivities.



Reindeer Andrea Wilkes, Maternal and Child Health, and Santa Marc LoCascio, ITS, mug it up for the camera.

Photos by
Daniel Axler

Dressed in her Santa hat, Lisa Mani, Office of HIPAA Compliance, is ready to enjoy some of the "pitch-in" food.

